

# Rex Americus

**It would be fair to say** no one could possibly have been prepared for what President Codbag laid out that evening. In a single acceptance speech lasting an hour, he changed the grammar and energy of the national discourse, and pointed to a future not even the founding fathers could have imagined in their wildest dreams.

"You know, folks, people keep telling me I'm not being tough enough," he said. "We've been here, what, four years, and believe me, they've not been easy. I've had to show the world who's boss, and I think they got the message. They know they can't mess with America. We've brought in seismic changes in the fabric of a nation —"

"Talk of mixing metaphors!" I smiled. "Seismic changes in fabrics!"

"— but you know what, things have changed in the world. I have nothing but respect for our founding fathers, god rest their souls, but it's a different world. I'm a big fan of minimum government, the less the better. I've been thinking about this a lot, believe me, I've been having sleepless nights thinking about this. And it came to me in a flash — we're not minimum enough. That's what's wrong with America.

"Now you're not going to believe this, but I actually like to walk through the hallways of the White House, looking at the portraits of presidents. They're great guys. And guess what, they actually speak to me. They inspire me. And there was one evening when George Washington whispered to me. Yes, folks, I mean whispered right into my ear. And he told me about Colonel Nicola. Let me tell you that story. So it seems right at the end of the American Revolutionary War, back when this great country was being born, this guy wrote to George Washington and

told him that he should go ahead and become the first king of America. Nicola thought that was what this country needed. Well, Lincoln said no, because he knew what the country needed right then was not a king but a president.

"But you know what, it's a different world. Look around, folks. The best countries have kings. Look at England, they love their kings and queens. Look at Netherlands, look at Thailand. Hey, look at Saudi Arabia, look at all those Arab countries. They all have kings. That's what I call a really minimum government — and that's what we need. America needs a good looking guy who does as little as possible, but knows how to give everybody a good time and feel good. Kings know how to stay out of their subjects' lives. That's what America needs. A federal monarchy."

The idea was diabolical in its simplicity. Whoever won the election — this party or that — would be the first anointed King of America, fulfilling the promise of the least government the country had ever known. That King, Codbag implied none too subtly, stood before them. "As King of America, I can promise you this — you're going to see amazing growth, you're going to see growth that will make the last four years look like a crapshoot, you're going to see a country no one wants to mess with. America won't just be great, it'll be the greatest," he said.

There was more, and it was even more drastic. It had been obvious for some time, he said, that America was being torn apart by internally divisive forces. "I see it every day on the hill — the other party just does not want to play ball. They want to cut the pie into two and keep their half. Well, I say to them, be careful what you wish for."

America, Codbag thought, was ready for dominions. "Once we become a kingdom, we'll need dominions. All kingdom have dominions, that's how kingdoms

work. And guess what, last night, I figured out the dominions. We already know that almost half of America consists of takers, people happy to live off the hard work of others," he said. "My good but unfortunate friend Mr Romney put the number at 47% — but to me that's as good as half.

Codbag promised to divide the United States 50-50, the makers in one half, the takers in the other. Each half would be a US Dominion, with its own President, House of Representatives and Senate. USA 50-50's administrative format would become binary, unique in the world: one country but with two umbilically joined governments. The two Americas would circle each other like giant dwarf stars, bound by mutual gravity, never to seek a separate freedom. USA Makers and USA Takers, or perhaps USA Rich and USA Poor, would share a legal and criminal code, tax framework and administrative structure but remain independent in every other respect. Each would have its President. But King Codbag, the monarch they reported to, would preside over both half-nations.

"Presidents are important and indispensable, of course," said Codbag, "but they must be seen for what they are, party functionaries." Ruling benignly over the presidents and cutting across party lines as the truly non-partisan leader would be King Codbag, dispensing free advice, ensuring no one did anything much to rule the country, and mostly getting out of the way and staying out of the way. The complete list of USA 50-50's maker and taker states, displayed on the screen several times during the acceptance speech, went thus —

THE RICH

1. Maryland
2. Alaska
3. New Jersey
4. Connecticut
5. Massachusetts
6. New Hampshire
7. Virginia
8. Hawaii
9. Delaware
10. California
11. Minnesota
12. Washington
13. Wyoming
14. Utah
15. Colorado
16. New York
17. Rhode Island
18. Vermont
19. Illinois
20. North Dakota
21. Wisconsin
22. Nebraska
23. Pennsylvania
24. Iowa
25. Texas

THE POOR

1. Kansas
2. Nevada
3. South Dakota
4. Oregon
5. Arizona
6. Americana
7. Maine
8. Georgia
9. Michigan
10. Ohio
11. Missouri
12. Florida
13. Montana
14. North Carolina
15. Idaho
16. Oklahoma
17. South Carolina
18. New Mexico
19. Louisiana
20. Tennessee
21. Alabama
22. Kentucky
23. Arkansas
24. West Virginia
25. Mississippi

Beth sat in stunned silence for most of five minutes, enough time for me to

mix myself a drink and wander back.

"Danny," she said, a tremble in her voice, "What's happening? He's destroying everything? We have to do something."

"Nothing to do with us, Beth," I said. "We're out of it."